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ILLITERACY IN ALABAMA—LET'S REMOVE IT

THE PROBLEM,
THE PLAN, THE PROCLAMATION
OF THE GOVERNOR

ILLITERACY DAY
MONDAY, JUNE 7, 1915



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ALABAMA ILLITERACY COMMISSION

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HON. JAMES B. ELLIS.....Selma
MISS MARY N. MOORE.....Athens
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R.R.C., Mar. 16

INTRODUCTION



THE Alabama Illiteracy Commission has no authority, nor does it desire to issue orders. Its duty is not to command but to point out an open door of opportunity and summon those who will to enter.

Believing that there are thousands of loyal sons and daughters of Alabama who are bigger in their sympathies and in their ideals of service than any monetary consideration, we invite such to join in a concerted statewide crusade for the elimination of illiteracy.

Let those who would enter such a service bear in mind that there are no beaten paths to follow and no proven guides to lead. The very essence of the work is research and initiative, and many who enlist will doubtless be able to devise better plans than any we are now prepared to suggest.

The chief qualifications for the work will be a spirit of consecration, of application, of patience, and of determination, and those who succeed may be teachers of the World, for as yet but little is known or attempted in this wide field. It is supposed that the actual work of teaching will very largely fall upon the shoulders of the teachers of the State, but the task is of such delicacy and magnitude as to require the best skill and effort of all who are prepared to assist.

The Illiteracy Commission desires to give the widest publicity to ways and means of attacking the problem and the fullest recognition to those who contribute in anywise to its solution. To these ends it solicits frequent communications, both critical and constructive, from all who are or may become interested in the movement to banish illiteracy.

Sincerely,

ALABAMA ILLITERACY COMMISSION,

WM. D. JELKS, Chairman,

WM. F. FEAGIN, Sec'ty-Treas.,

JAMES B. ELLIS,

MISS MARY N. MOORE,

MRS. W. K. LINSOTT.

PROCLAMATION BY THE GOVERNOR



WHEREAS, the people of Alabama look with pride upon her remarkable record of progress and are moved with a passionate desire to further promote her industrial, intellectual, and moral efficiency; and,

Whereas, the realization of this patriotic ambition calls for the promotion of literacy and the elimination of illiteracy; and,

Whereas, intelligent effort in this direction requires: First, a knowledge of conditions. Second, the organization of the forces who are to perform the work. Third, the united and persistent efforts of the workers.

Therefore, I, Charles Henderson, Governor of Alabama, in response to the widespread sentiment among our people, as expressed by the Legislature of Alabama, the Alabama Illiteracy Commission and the Alabama Educational Association do hereby set apart and designate the first Monday in June, one thousand nine hundred fifteen, to be observed throughout the State as ILLITERACY DAY, and I appoint and fix this as the time when every literate man, woman, and youth in the commonwealth shall consecrate himself to the service of his State and community, and as the date when the people shall meet, confer, and organize clubs for the banishment of illiteracy in the several communities.

I call upon the teachers in every community, the school improvement associations, the chambers of commerce, the farmers' unions, the press of the State, the ministers, lawyers, physicians, farmers, business men, and all others to lay aside matters of private concern and to heartily cooperate in working out plans for the removal of illiteracy.

With a lofty faith and resolution that Alabama, under the favorable guidance of Almighty God, shall wipe away the black stain, I call on every literate man, woman, and child of every station, community or creed to consecrate himself to this stupendous though surmountable task.

Done in our City of Montgomery, on this the fifth day of May, in the year of our Lord, 1915, and the 140th year of our American independence.

CHAS. HENDERSON,
Governor of Alabama.

CONDITIONS



THE magnitude of the task confronting us, if we are to banish our illiteracy, will appear from the fact that there are 641,168 persons in our State from the ages of 10 to 20 inclusive, 15% of whom, or 96,406, are illiterate, while from the ages of 21 and over, we have 1,015,070 persons, 26% of whom, or 266,273 can neither read nor write.

If we sort out our white men and women we will find 31,661 males of voting age, and 33,765 mature women who are fettered by illiteracy, either number approximating the combined adult white male population of our three largest cities, Birmingham, Mobile, and Montgomery.

Based on the 1910 census, only 3,874 of our native white illiterates are city dwellers, while 80,894 of them reside in the country. The town rate is 2.5% and the country rate is 11.5%, but there is no room for a quarrel between the city and the country. In our only city with a population exceeding 100,000, our native white illiteracy is greater than in any city in its class in the country except Atlanta, Louisville, Richmond, and Nashville. There are in Birmingham, Mobile and Montgomery, respectively, 186, 39, and 33 native white men of voting age who have to have assistance in casting their ballots.

In our four cities of the second class with populations exceeding 10,000 inhabitants, there are 701 native white persons 10 years of age and over who cannot read and write.

There are in our twenty-one cities of the third class with populations from 2,500 to 10,000, in round numbers 2,200 native whites 10 years of age and over, who cannot read and write.

The lowest rate of illiteracy among our native whites is found in Montgomery County, but even there we find 122 males of voting age who cannot intelligently transact any business requiring the ability to read and write.

The statistics showing the rank of the several counties is contained elsewhere in this pamphlet.

SIGNIFICANT FACTS ABOUT ALABAMA'S STANDING IN ILLITERACY AS COMPARED WITH THE 47 OTHER STATES IN THE UNION

Total population 10 years of age and over.....	47
Total white population 10 years of age and over.....	44
Total native-born white population 10 years of age and over	44
Total negro population 10 years of age and over.....	48
Total male population 21 years of age and over.....	46
Total white male population 21 years of age and over.....	42
Total native-born white male population 21 years of age and over	43
Total negro male population 21 years of age and over.....	48

Wherever we may choose to place the responsibility for such conditions, deplorable and lamentable as they may be, and however we may attempt to shift the burden of the blame, they are a serious reflection upon every man and woman within our borders and a discredit to our State.

THE PROBLEM

Those who have made the most exhaustive and scholarly study of illiteracy conditions have told us that the reducible minimum to which illiteracy should be lowered in the United States is 1% for native-born whites, 5% for negroes, and 12% for foreign-born whites, the latter number representing the average illiteracy of the countries from which our immigrants come.

If we accept the standard which others by common consent have set up, Alabama's problem becomes one of reducing her native white illiteracy from 9.9% to the minimum of 1%, and her negro illiteracy from 40.1% to 5%. We may ignore our foreign-born population, inasmuch as statistics show that their percentage of illiteracy, so far as Alabama is concerned, is already below the minimum stated above.

THE MOONLIGHT SCHOOLS OF KENTUCKY

Perhaps the most unique and significant of all the efforts to remove illiteracy was undertaken by Mrs. Cora Wilson Stewart, Superintendent of Schools in Rowan County, Ken-

tucky, in September, 1911. *"Illiteracy in the United States and an Experiment for Its Elimination," tells the story:

"Having studied carefully the conditions of the county, Mrs. Stewart decided to open night schools for adults on moonlight nights in the public schoolhouses of the county. She outlined her plan to the teachers and called for volunteers. All the teachers of the county responded. On Labor Day, September 4, 1911, these teachers visited the homes of the people throughout the county, explained the plan, and announced that moonlight schools would be opened the next evening. It was expected that the response would be slow, but more than 1,200 men and women from 18 to 86 years old were enrolled the first evening. They came trooping over the hills and out of the hollows, some to add to the meager education received in the inadequate schools of their childhood, some to receive their first lessons in reading and writing. Among these were not only illiterate wives, sons, and daughters, but also illiterate merchants or "storekeepers," illiterate ministers, and illiterate lumbermen. Mothers, bent with age, came that they might learn to read letters from absent sons and daughters, and that they might learn for the first time to write to them."

Almost one-third of the population of the county were enrolled. Says Mrs. Stewart:

"They had all the excuses and all the barriers which any people might offer,—high hills, bridgeless streams, rugged roads, weariness from the day's hard toil, the shame of beginning study late in life, and all the others,—but they were not seeking excuses,—they were sincerely and earnestly seeking knowledge. Their interests, their zeal, and their enthusiasm were wonderful to witness. It was truly an inspiring sight to see these aged pupils bending over the desks which their children and grandchildren had occupied during the day. Their delight in learning and their pride in their achievements exceeded any joy that I have ever witnessed."

In some instances, where shyness prevented some of the adults from attending 'at first, lessons were given in their homes until they could read and write a little. They were then willing and eager to enroll in the night schools.

In September, 1912, a "moonlight school" teachers' institute was held in Morehead, Ky., and the superintendent and teachers who had conducted the first moonlight schools instructed others who wished to do work of this kind in Rowan and ad-

*United States Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1913, No. 20—Whole No. 530.

joining counties, and in the fall of 1912 the movement spread to eight or ten other counties, while the enrollment of adults in Rowan County reached nearly 1,600.

The success of the men and women proves that it is not so difficult for illiterate grown-ups to learn to read and write as is generally supposed. They learn in a very short time, if given opportunity. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are simple subjects when mature minds are concentrated upon them. A child of ordinary mind can be taught to read and write in three or four weeks, and the adult can do at least as well. One man, aged 30, after four lessons in the evening school, wrote the county superintendent a legible letter. Another man, aged 50, wrote a legible letter after seven nights' attendance. A woman, aged 70, wrote a legible letter after eight nights of study. These cases are, of course, exceptional; but experience has shown that a few weeks' attendance at the night schools has been sufficient to enable the adult pupils to pass over the dark lines of illiteracy and to get into the class of literates.

One of the significant facts brought out in this experiment is that adults of limited education have taken advantage of the opportunity to return to school and to increase their knowledge. Of the 1,600 adult pupils attending night school during the second term, 300 were unable to read and write at all, 300 were from those who had learned in September, 1911, and 1,000 were men and women of meager education.

In a number of instances adults from the night schools have enrolled as pupils in the day schools; and the superintendent states that the presence of a determined man or woman in the school has proven an inspiration to pupils and teacher.

The change in the attitude of the community toward the school, where the night school has been undertaken, is in itself significant. A school trustee thus describes the change in his community:

"I have lived in this district for 55 years and I never saw any such interest as we have here now. The school used to just drag along, and nobody seemed interested. We never had a gathering at the school, and nobody thought of visiting the school. We had not had night school but three weeks un-

til we got together right. We papered the house, put in new windows, purchased new stovepipe, made new steps, contributed money, and bought the winter's fuel."

The remark of one old woman of 70 probably voices the feelings and sentiments of all the adults who have learned to read and write in these night schools. When asked what benefit the moonlight school had been to her, she said: "Oh, to be able to read my Bible and to write to my children and grandchildren! I would not take anything for the privilege."

The studies pursued in these moonlight schools are reading, writing, arithmetic, and spelling. Brief drills are given in the essential facts of language, history, geography, civics, sanitation, agriculture, and horticulture. The reading text is the Rowan County School Messenger, edited by the county superintendent, published weekly for the special benefit of the adult students, and furnished free of charge. This paper deals largely with school and county affairs, and the news is made up in short sentences designed to help the pupils in their efforts to read.

This experiment in Rowan County, Ky., shows that it is possible to bring help to illiterate men and women even under the most difficult and adverse circumstances.

PLAN OF ATTACK

The inauguration and oversight of the campaign for the banishment of illiteracy is a problem confronting the Alabama Illiteracy Commission, but if the undertaking is to be the inspiring success it ought to be, there must be men and women in every county and in every community who will patiently and faithfully assist in working out and in prosecuting plans for the accomplishment of this task.

With this in view the Commission will, in the near future, appoint a sub-commission for each county, to be composed of at least two business men, the county superintendent of education, the principal of the county high school, or some other prominent teacher, and the president of the school improvement association, or of the federation of women's clubs.

Upon this committee will rest the responsibility of arousing the proper sentiment and enthusiasm throughout the county,

of mapping out plans for the workers enlisted, and of having the oversight of the general plan and policy of the illiteracy campaign in the county. This county organization will maintain the closest relationship with the State Commission and will report regularly upon the condition and progress of the movement in the county. The State Commission, on the other hand, will lend all aid and encouragement possible to the county organization and will publish from time to time such data and plans as may be worth while for encouragement and information.

No matter how efficient the state and county commissions may be, however, the campaign against illiteracy will not succeed unless there is in each neighborhood not only a teacher and school trustees, but a number of other public-spirited men and women ready to cooperate and promote the movement.

In conformity with the proclamation of the Governor and the plans of the Alabama Illiteracy Commission, it is expected that the district trustees will arrange for a meeting of the people of the school district at the public schoolhouse at some convenient hour, on the first Monday in June, say at ten o'clock, the purpose being the organization of a local club for the study and removal of illiteracy in the district.

The meeting should be called to order by the chairman of the district trustees, and after devotional exercises, including singing, the proclamation of the Governor should be read and a brief statement of the purpose of the meeting made by the chairman or some one appointed by him. At this point a twenty-minute address by the strongest available man should be made, looking towards creating a sentiment favorable to the organization of the club. He should set out the facts which necessitate the organization, and show the magnitude of the problem to be attacked. The scope of the work and appropriate statistics are contained in this pamphlet.

It will be all the more impressive if a chart showing in large black letters the relative standing of the county, has been prepared in advance from the tables found on pages further on in this bulletin. A similar chart should also be prepared in advance from the data secured in the school census taken in the summer of 1914 for persons from the ages of ten

to twenty inclusive. The figures and rank of the several counties of the State are contained in "Literacy and Illiteracy in Alabama," published by the Department of Education. The data for each district may be had from the census booklets in possession of the county superintendent of education.

After the address referred to above, two or three five-minute talks should be made by leading persons in the community. Such expressions should be spontaneous and if the proper sentiment has been aroused, they should look directly toward a permanent organization of a district illiteracy club. A permanent chairman and secretary should be chosen and the organization initiated. It will not be necessary to have a constitution and by-laws, but at least two definite committees should be appointed to report at a future fixed meeting.

(a) Committee on census enumeration.

Two duties in particular rest upon the shoulders of this committee. First: To secure the full name and address of every person in the district ten years of age and over who cannot read and write. Second: To secure the attendance of persons so enumerated at such evening schools as may be arranged for.

(b) Committee on evening schools.

This committee will be expected to arrange for the conduct of the evening schools, and under the direction of the sub-commission of the county to aid in the enlistment of volunteers for the work of teaching. There will doubtless be cases where, because of temerity, embarrassment or isolation, some illiterate persons will not attend an evening school. This committee will endeavor to work out some plan for bringing such individuals to school or taking the school to such individuals through personal work.

After the appointment of these committees and the conclusion of such other matters as seem pertinent to the satisfactory organization and continuation of the club and the initiation of the illiteracy campaign in the district, the club should adjourn until a fixed date, not later than ten days hence, when reports from the committees indicated above are to be heard. The secretary of the club should at once send to the sub-commission of the county the complete record of the day's proceedings.

ILLITERATES TEN YEARS OF AGE AND OVER

NATIVE WHITE

Rank.	County.	Number.	Per Cent.
1	Montgomery	355	1.7
2	Sumter	73	1.8
3	Dallas	177	2.4
4	Greene	66	2.8
5	Mobile	980	3.0
6	Bullock	126	3.5
7	Wilcox	164	3.5
8	Jefferson	3,408	3.6
9	Lowndes	107	3.7
10	Macon	134	4.4
11	Lee	510	5.2
12	Marengo	368	5.6
13	Perry	280	5.8
14	Elmore	675	6.3
15	Chambers	863	6.9
16	Baldwin	600	7.2
17	Monroe	570	7.3
18	Autauga	437	7.4
19	Hale	341	7.8
20	Barbour	741	8.3
21	Butler	817	8.3
22	Clarke	818	8.3
23	Coosa	625	8.5
24	Russell	372	8.5
25	Choctaw	437	8.9
26	Pickens	764	8.9
27	Lamar	893	9.1
28	Morgan	1,669	9.2
29	Pike	1,115	9.4
30	Bibb	914	9.5
31	Washington	541	9.6
32	Cullman	1,813	9.9
33	Crenshaw	1,145	10.1
34	Colbert	1,100	10.2
35	Clay	1,303	10.3
36	Calhoun	2,163	10.7
37	DeKalb	2,051	10.9
38	Tallapoosa	1,522	10.9
39	Henry	841	11.1
40	Conecuh	930	11.3
41	Marshall	2,101	11.3
42	Talladega	1,581	11.3
43	Escambia	1,034	11.4
44	Lauderdale	1,915	11.6
45	St. Clair	1,359	11.6

Rank.	County.	Number.	Per Cent.
46	Madison	2,391	11.7
47	Tuscaloosa	2,419	11.9
48	Houston	1,938	12.0
49	Winston	1,048	12.4
50	Limestone	1,449	12.5
51	Shelby	1,686	12.6
52	Walker	2,599	12.8
53	Etowah	2,913	12.9
54	Blount	1,824	13.3
55	Randolph	1,712	13.3
56	Dale	1,495	13.4
57	Marion	1,547	13.6
58	Chilton	1,753	13.7
59	Fayette	1,373	13.9
60	Covington	2,388	14.3
61	Geneva	2,385	15.9
62	Cleburne	1,388	16.1
63	Coffee	2,282	16.2
64	Franklin	1,949	16.6
65	Jackson	3,519	17.0
66	Cherokee	2,084	17.0
67	Lawrence	1,848	17.9

ILLITERATE MALES OF VOTING AGE

NATIVE WHITE

Rank.	County.	Number.	Per Cent.
1	Montgomery	113	1.6
2	Sumter	26	1.9
3	Dallas	73	2.8
4	Greene	26	3.3
5	Mobile	370	3.3
6	Jefferson	1,150	3.4
7	Lowndes	42	4.3
8	Wilcox	73	4.4
9	Bullock	57	4.5
10	Lee	160	4.9
11	Marengo	145	6.3
12	Macon	66	6.4
13	Perry	106	6.6
14	Elmore	270	7.7
15	Chambers	322	7.9
16	Baldwin	241	8.1
17	Monroe	221	8.5
18	Autauga	182	9.1
19	Barbour	266	9.1

Rank.	County.	Number.	Per Cent.
20	Russell	135	9.1
21	Clarke	315	9.5
22	Colbert	355	9.5
23	Hale	146	9.5
24	Butler	312	9.8
25	Bibb	331	10.1
26	Morgan	641	10.1
27	Choctaw	167	10.2
28	Lamar	326	10.3
29	Coosa	256	10.6
30	Pickens	309	10.6
31	Calhoun	716	10.9
32	Cullman	625	11.0
33	Washington	213	11.0
34	Crenshaw	430	11.4
35	Pike	445	11.5
36	Henry	288	11.6
37	Walker	793	11.6
38	Clay	486	11.8
39	Talladega	542	11.9
40	DeKalb	746	12.3
41	Lauderdale	666	12.5
42	Escambia	368	12.6
43	Winston	343	12.6
44	Marshall	756	12.7
45	Tallapoosa	597	13.2
46	Madison	887	13.3
47	Conecuh	362	13.4
48	Houston	708	13.4
49	Tuscaloosa	954	13.4
50	St. Clair	514	13.5
51	Shelby	610	13.7
52	Limestone	541	13.9
53	Etowah	1,110	14.3
54	Marion	501	14.3
55	Dale	536	14.9
56	Blount	661	15.0
57	Chilton	625	15.0
58	Fayette	480	15.1
59	Covington	874	15.4
60	Randolph	651	15.7
61	Jackson	1,183	17.2
62	Franklin	656	17.4
63	Geneva	839	17.4
64	Cleburne	439	17.7
65	Coffee	811	18.1
66	Lawrence	610	18.4
67	Cherokee	817	20.2

ILLITERATE CHILDREN FROM 10 TO 20 YEARS

NATIVE WHITE

Rank.	County.	Number.	Per Cent.
1	Lowndes	4	.5
2	Dallas	18	.8
3	Montgomery	57	1.1
4	Sumter	15	1.1
5	Greene	8	1.3
6	Macon	19	1.9
7	Bullock	22	2.1
8	Mobile	239	2.3
9	Lee	69	2.3
10	Marengo	51	2.5
11	Jefferson	807	2.5
12	Perry	50	2.9
13	Hale	48	3.6
14	Russell	44	3.6
15	Coosa	90	3.7
16	Elmore	162	4.0
17	Pickens	146	4.4
18	Pike	176	4.6
19	Autauga	100	5.2
20	Wilcox	75	5.2
21	Barbour	179	5.8
22	Clarke	198	6.1
23	Baldwin	227	6.3
24	Tallapoosa	340	6.3
25	Butler	260	7.0
26	Calhoun	565	7.6
27	Morgan	483	7.7
28	Chilton	369	7.7
29	Lamar	303	7.8
30	DeKalb	556	7.9
31	Washington	163	7.9
32	Colbert	310	8.0
33	Crenshaw	308	8.4
34	Shelby	401	8.4
35	Tuscaloosa	588	8.7
36	Marshall	672	9.2
37	Bibb	353	9.2
38	Talladega	449	9.4
39	Chambers	481	9.7
40	Conecuh	272	9.7
41	Henry	234	9.7
42	Blount	546	9.9
43	Clay	458	10.1
44	St. Clair	467	10.1
45	Monroe	281	10.2



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Rank. County.

46	Cullman		
47	Etowah	779	10.6
48	Houston	643	10.7
49	Marion	496	10.7
50	Escambia	405	10.9
51	Lauderdale	660	10.9
52	Cherokee	484	11.3
53	Dale	453	11.3
54	Lawrence	429	11.6
55	Choctaw	244	11.8
56	Franklin	492	11.8
57	Winston	406	12.8
58	Fayette	517	12.9
59	Walker	951	12.9
60	Covington	959	13.4
61	Limestone	566	13.4
62	Jackson	931	13.6
63	Coffee	775	13.8
64	Cleburne	460	14.6
65	Madison	1,024	14.7
66	Geneva	1,010	17.4
67	Randolph	1,140	21.3



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